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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004239

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TAGS: EG IZ PGOV PREL SA UN
SUBJECT: CHARGE MEETS WITH PM'S CHIEF OF STAFF NOVEMBER 14

Classified By: Charge d,Affaires Daniel Speckhard, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a November 14 meeting with Charge, PM Chief of Staff Dr. Tariq Abdullah said the PM would review the draft U.S. letter to the UNSC on UNSCR renewal later in the day. According to Dr. Tariq, the PM's cabinet reshuffle may not happen for a month; the PM is still in the process of getting and reviewing possible candidates to replace some current ministers. Dr. Tariq requested that the USG continue to keep the GOI informed about contacts with ex-Baathists and asked for U.S. assistance in opening up working-level channels to the Saudis. END SUMMARY.

PM Delegation to U.S., UNSCR Letter

¶2. (C) Charge offered condolences for the mass kidnapping at the Ministry of Higher Education and pledged strong MNF-I support for efforts to recover the hostages and bring the perpetrators to justice. He asked Dr. Tariq about a phone call the Embassy received the morning of November 14 proposing a three-person delegation of PM's advisors visit Washington in the near future, noting that this is a time of great political activity in the U.S. Dr. Tariq said the goal of the trip was to build on the PM's desire to strengthen communication with Washington and to exchange views. Charge said we welcomed the goal and we would pass the request to Washington.

¶3. (C) Charge asked whether the GOI had any objection to the draft text of the USG letter to the UNSC on UNSCR rollover. Dr. Tariq said he needs until the evening of November 14 to finish reviewing the USG draft with the PM (NOTE: In a separate discussion, NSA Rubaie said the GOI would likely ask for a reference to the intention for an agreement on further defining the authorities and responsibilities of the two sides. END NOTE).

Possible GOI Cabinet Changes

¶4. (C) Charge asked about reports that the PM is preparing to reshuffle his cabinet. Dr. Tariq said the PM had found some ministries "not up to par" and is seeking to replace ministers to make the government more efficient. Almost all political blocs have agreed to the need for changes, according to Dr. Tariq. As opposed to past practices, the PM wants blocs to submit several names as candidates for replacements, and the PM is reserving the right to reject them all if they are not competent.

¶5. (C) The PM will form a committee to review candidates' qualifications and possibly interview them, and seek the committee's opinion in making a final decision. Dr. Tariq thinks the process may take as long as a month.

High Level Working Group

¶6. (C) Charge asked Dr. Tariq to confirm that GOI national Security Advisor Rubaie would be available in the coming weeks to move forward the High Level Working Group and avoid extensive out-of-country travel. Charge pointed out this is a priority for President Bush and PM Maliki.

De-Baathification

¶7. (C) On de-Baathification, Dr. Tariq said that the PM wants a de-politicized process based on the South African model, with prosecution of only the most egregious crimes. However, Dr. Tariq noted the process is in the Council of Representatives' (CoR's) hands.

USG Contacts With Ex-Baathists

¶8. (C) Charge asked for further insight into recent concerns expressed by the PM to General Abizaid over U.S. contacts with ex-Baathists. Dr. Tariq said Iraqi politicians themselves had in fact recently called for dialogue with ex-Baathists, and a group of ex-Baathists had sent a letter to the GOI recently asking for dialogue. However, some ex-Baathists are boasting that they have "an open channel" to the USG and therefore do not need to talk with the GOI; this is what concerns the GOI. Dr. Tariq asked only that the USG keep the GOI informed about such contacts.

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¶9. (C) Charge told Dr. Tariq the USG considers that the GOI must be at the center of any reconciliation process. Charge noted that the Ambassador had recently sought the PM's approval before agreeing to talk with a group of former Baathists. The USG is mindful of GOI sensitivities and will continue to work closely with GOI on this issue.

Iraqi's Relations with Neighbors

¶10. (C) Dr. Tariq said the PM would like to visit Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The PM is interested in receiving an invitation from Egypt. With respect to Saudi Arabia, Dr. Tariq emphasized that they need to understand that failure to strengthen the GOI would work in Iran's favor.

¶11. (C) Dr. Tariq speculated that while the high-level visits have symbolic value, working-level contacts are more productive to building an effective relationship. He said they were thinking of sending a delegation, perhaps one the Chief of Staff would lead, to Saudi Arabia before the PM. Dr. Tariq asked for us help in opening a working-level channel, particularly to Saudi intelligence and security officials.
Speckhard